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Delhi and Gujarat collide for supremacy

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PHOTO: X

No GST on UPI payments above Rs 2,000: Govt

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The government on Friday clarified that it is not mulling to levy GST on UPI transactions above Rs 2,000. Clarifying on reports, which said that the government is considering levying Goods and Services Tax (GST) on UPI transactions over Rs 2,000, the finance ministry said they are completely false, misleading, and without any basis. "Currently, there is no such proposal before the government," the ministry said in a statement. GST is levied on charges, such as the Merchant Discount Rate , relating to payments made using certain instruments. Effective January 2020, the Central Board of Direct Taxes has removed the MDR on person-to-merchant UPI transactions. "Since currently no MDR is charged on UPI transactions, there is consequently no GST applicable to these transactions," the ministry said, adding that the government is continues to promote UPI. *—PTI*

Rubio: May drop Russia-Ukraine peace efforts

PARIS, 18 APRIL

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that the US may be ready to "move on" from efforts for a Russia-Ukraine peace deal if there is not progress in the coming days. Speaking in Paris after a marathon day of landmark talks among US, Ukrainian and European officials, Rubio said the discussions had been constructive and produced an outline for steps toward peace. "We are now reaching a point where we need to decide whether this is even possible or not," Rubio told reporters upon departure. After weeks of efforts by the Trump administration to broker a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine have failed to bring an end to the fighting, Rubio said the US administration wants to decide "in a matter of days whether or not this is doable in the next few weeks." *—PTI*

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UNESCO World Register adds Gita, Natyashastra

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Manuscripts of 'Bhagavad Gita' and Bharat Muni's 'Natyashastra' feature among the 74 documentary heritage collections added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. The register includes entries on scientific revolution, women's contribution to history and major milestones of multilateralism from 72 countries and four international organisations. It comprises books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, sound or video recordings as a documentary heritage of humanity. Preserved at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, the Natyashastra was codified around the 2nd century BC. An epitome of the Natyaveda, it embodies a comprehensive set of rules that define various aspects of performing arts, thus articulating the character of Indian theatre, poetics, aesthetics, dance and music. The Bhagavad Gita, containing 700 verses, is embedded within the Mahabharata. *—PTI*

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K'taka caste census may take a year: Satish Jarkiholi

Says report is 10 yrs old, cautions govt against hasty action

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Karnataka PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi on Friday said a decision on the Social and Educational Survey report, popularly referred to as caste census, may take at least a year.

"It is not something that will happen tomorrow, it may take one year. Don't expect it tomorrow, it may take a year, because there are issues, they are complicated. If everyone has to be pacified and taken into confidence, many meetings have to be held, the government has to be in a compromise mode, because this cannot be done all of a sudden," Jarkiholi said.

He said the report was almost 10 years old and the cabinet had taken it for consideration more than a year after its submission in February 2024.

"Nothing to worry, if discussions go on for a year. There is no urgency. Taking everyone into confidence, with unanimity and with cooperation of everyone, we will try to implement it," he added.

He also cautioned that any misstep in addressing the concerns raised by various castes over the report may cause problems for the ruling Congress party in the future.

Asked about differences among Ministers in cabinet, Jarkiholi cited an example of discussion on the population of Sadara community, which is shown at 65,000 and said some Minister pointed at the community's presence in districts of Haveri, Davangere, Chitradurga, and in Shivamogga, objecting to the numbers.

"Enhancing reservation may not be possible as of now. For now the challenge before us is rectifying the data. Opportunity should be given to rectify, if people want to opt for being considered under a different category or with their original major community, it should be allowed," he said.

His remarks come a day after a special cabinet meeting convened to deliberate on the caste census report ended without any concrete decision amid internal differences within the government.

The cabinet is scheduled to take up the matter again on 2 May. *—PTI*

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> **Don't expect it tomorrow, it may take a year, because there are issues, they are complicated. If everyone has to be pacified and taken into confidence, many meetings have to be held, the government has to be in a compromise mode, because this cannot be done all of a sudden**
> —Satish Jarkiholi, Karnataka PWD Minister

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

A skit on the crucifixion of Jesus performed on Good Friday at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Frazer Town, Bengaluru ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Suchivrat Kulkarni, the student from Bidar who was asked to remove his Janivaras, or sacred thread ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Students asked to remove 'sacred thread' before CET

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Some students were allegedly asked to remove their Janivaras (sacred thread worn by Brahmins) before entering the CET examination hall at centres in Bidar and Shivamogga districts.

In Bidar, a student had to return home without writing the Maths paper on Thursday morning, after the screening committee at the examination centre in Sai Spoorthi College allegedly asked him to remove the janivara before entering the exam hall, officials said.

Suchivrat Kulkarni, the student who missed the exam, said, "I was asked to remove the janivara by the college management and three people who looked like police. They told me that I will be allowed to write the paper only after that."

The student had already written the Physics and Chemistry exams at the same centre on 16 April while wearing the janivara. But, on Thursday, during the Mathematics exam, he was stopped.

The staff allegedly told him, "What if you harm yourself using the janivara?"

"They said, proper checks were not done for other papers and they were doing it now," Kulkarni claimed.

He was later allowed to appear for the Biology exam wearing the sacred thread.

Similarly, three students were allegedly asked to remove their janivaras at the Adichunchanagiri PU College exam centre in Shivamogga on Wednesday, police said.

However, "the staff claimed that they did not ask any students to remove their sacred thread. As per regulation, all they asked them was to remove the kashi dhara (scared thread worn around the wrist)," a senior police officer said. "But these are allegations need to be verified."

The incidents prompted sharp criticism from officials.

"This is a violation of the religious right to conscience and the practice of religion," Shashidhar Kosambe, a member of the Commission for Protection of Child Rights, told Salar News.

—Salar News with Agencies

Man rapes minor, dumps newborn baby in garbage

BENGALURU 18 APRIL

A 23-year-old auto driver was arrested by the City police on Friday after BBMP workers discovered a newborn's body in a plastic bag at a garbage dump in Gandhinagar, recently. A probe launched by the Yelahanka police revealed that the infant was born to a minor girl in a two-year secret relationship with the accused.

The baby reportedly died during a unassisted home-delivery. Police said that the accused, Bharat, had been in a "secret relationship" and was sexually abusing the minor for more than two years. Following the death, he coerced the minor to give the baby to a neighbour who disposed of it. *—Salar News*

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India rejects B'desh's remarks on WB

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

India on Friday rejected remarks by Bangladeshi officials on violence in West Bengal and asked Dhaka to focus on protecting the rights of its minorities instead of "virtue signalling".

"We reject the remarks made by the Bangladesh side with regard to the incidents in West Bengal," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"This is a barely disguised and disingenuous attempt to draw a parallel with India's concerns over the ongoing persecution of minorities in Bangladesh where the criminal perpetrators of such acts continue to roam free," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to media queries regarding comments made by Bangladesh officials on the developments in West Bengal. "Instead of making unwarranted comments and indulging in virtue signalling, Bangladesh would do better to focus on protecting the rights of its own minorities," he said.

Shafiqul Alam, the press secretary to Bangladesh Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus, on Thursday called on New Delhi and the West Bengal to take "all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population". *—PTI*

> **This is a disingenuous attempt to draw a parallel with India's concerns over the ongoing persecution of minorities in Bangladesh** -Randhir Jaiswal, MEA Spokesperson

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose en-route to visit a relief camp for those affected by the riots ***PHOTO: PTI***

Modi talks with Musk on technology collaboration

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi engaged in a conversation with Elon Musk, the world's richest individual, on Friday, exploring possibilities for collaboration in technology and innovation. Modi took to social media platform X to share insights from their discussion, which built upon topics addressed during their earlier meeting in Washington, DC earlier this year. In his post, Modi expressed that both leaders acknowledged the significant potential for partnership in these vital sectors, underscoring India's commitment to strengthening ties with the United States. Musk, whose ventures include Tesla and SpaceX, is also recognised for his influence during the Trump administration, notably regarding government efficiency reforms through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). The dialogue highlights the ongoing efforts to enhance international cooperation in technology and innovation. *—PTI*

NOT 'HAPPY' ANYMORE

Punjab terrorist arrested by FBI; extradition efforts on

Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passia, a wanted terrorist was arrested by FBI in the US ***PHOTO: FB***

NEW YORK/CHANDIGARH 18 APRIL

An Indian, wanted in connection with multiple terror attacks across Punjab and allegedly collaborated with Pakistan's ISI, was arrested by the FBI, the US agency said.

Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passia alias Jora, an "alleged terrorist who had illegally entered the US", was arrested by the FBI and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Enforcement and Removal Operations in Sacramento.

"Today, Harpreet Singh, an alleged terrorist responsible for terror attacks in Punjab, India, was arrested by the FBI and ERO in Sacramento. Linked to two international terrorist groups, he entered the US illegally and used burner phones to evade capture," FBI Sacramento said in a statement on X.

Agents from the FBI's Legal Attaché office in New Delhi, India, informed Sacramento that Singh was wanted in connection with multiple terror attacks across Punjab, India, FBI Sacramento said. Singh is suspected to have collaborated with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Khalistani terrorist group Babbar Khalsa International (BKI).

He was wanted for orchestrating 16 terror attacks including 14 grenade strikes in Punjab,

On X, he said, "The arrest of Harpreet Singh a close associate of Pakistan-based terrorist Rinda, is a major milestone in the sustained crackdown on ISI-backed terror networks."

In a video message, he also said, "After coming in contact with Pak-based Rinda, he Passia became a primary node through whom at the best of Pak ISI the terror modules used to carry out different types of terror acts in Punjab."

"After September 2024, Passia had a direct involvement in many attacks," the DGP said. *—PTI*

Bike rider killed, pillion rider critical in Periyapatna

MYSURU, 18 APRIL

One person died and another sustained serious injuries after the bike they were riding collided head on with a lorry in Periyapatna in Mysuru. The deceased is Samuel, 22 and the injured is Naveen, 26. While Samuel hailed from Kanaganahalli in Kalaburagi, Naveen hailed from Madikeri in Kodagu. The incident occurred when the two-wheeler they were riding from Koppa in Chikkamagaluru to Kushalnagar in Kodagu. The lorry was on its way from Kushalnagar to Periyapatna. The injured was rushed to the Kushalnagar Government Public Hospital. A case was registered. —*Salar News*

Half-burnt body of man found near Jayapura in Mysuru

MYSURU, 18 APRIL

Authorities have uncovered the partially charred remains of a 35-year-old man at the roadside linking to Gumachanahalli in Jayapura hobli on Friday. The body, which reportedly showed signs of being doused in petrol, raised immediate alarm. In response to the grim discovery, senior police officials, including Superintendent of Police N Vishnuvardhan, Deputy Superintendent of Police Karimravthar, and Circle Inspector Shivanand Shetty, arrived at the scene accompanied by experts from the fingerprint, forensics, and dog squad units. The local Jayapura Police have since registered a case, and investigations are currently underway to identify the victim and gather more information about the circumstances surrounding this tragic incident. Further updates from the police are anticipated as the inquiry develops. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Drug-induced auto driver held for ruckus on City road

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

An auto-rickshaw driver was arrested following a drug-induced rampage near Krishnarajapuram Market in the early hours of Friday. Armed with a machete around 3.30am, the suspect allegedly vandalised the windows and windshields of at least two parked vehicles, including goods carriers, and caused damage to several others. Local residents managed to subdue him and handed him over to the KR Puram Police. Initial investigations revealed that the man, whose identity is being withheld, was not affiliated with any known gang. Police confirmed he was under the influence of drugs, believed to be ganja, and was acting aggressively, threatening vendors and bystanders. A case has been filed, and the suspect is undergoing testing for substance abuse. Vehicle owners are calling for enhanced police patrolling and stronger action against drug users in the area during night hours. —*PTI*

CM: No one opposed caste census in cabinet meeting

Dy CM too ruled out any aggressive arguments at the meeting

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said there was no opposition to the Social and Educational Survey report, popularly known as caste census, during a special meeting of the State Cabinet convened on Thursday evening.

Siddaramaiah said none of the ministers indulged in any loud arguments with each other during the discussions as reported by a section of the media.

"Yesterday, it (caste census report) was discussed in the Cabinet; it (the discussion) was incomplete, and it has been posted for another day. The subject will be discussed in the next Cabinet (meeting). No one has opposed it," the CM said, adding, "Media reports that some ministers indulged in a loud argument with each other are false."

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, too, said there wasn't any aggressive argument in the Cabinet meeting. He said, "We have shared thoughts (on the report). Speaking in raised voices or arguments... nothing of that sort happened. Suggestions were given. Other than that, nothing was decided."

The Cabinet discussed the parameters used for conducting the survey and sought more information from senior officials **PHOTO: PTI**

The Cabinet discussed the parameters used for conducting the survey and sought more information from senior officials and technical details from senior officials, Law and Parliament Affairs Minister HK Patil said after attending the meeting on Thursday. He added that the Cabinet will once again discuss the survey report on 2 May.

> **Media reports that some ministers indulged in a loud argument with each other (at the cabinet meeting on caste census) are false**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Sources said some ministers expressed reservations about the survey report, citing concerns expressed from several quarters, calling it unscientific and outdated. Following this, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah asked all ministers to give their opinion in writing or verbally, they said.

Even though there were reports that a couple of ministers spoke in an "upset tone" during the discussion on the survey report, expressing their reservation about it, this was not confirmed by other ministers in the meeting. —*PTI*

RAGA WRITES TO CM

'Enact Vemula Act to end caste bias'

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, urging the state government to enact a law named Rohith Vemula Act to end caste-based discrimination in the education system.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha highlighted the discrimination BR Ambedkar faced during his life.

Quoting Ambedkar, he wrote "Here he describes an incident during a long bullock cart journey: 'There was plenty of food with us. There was hunger burning within us; with all this, we were to sleep without food; that was because we could get no water, and we could get no water because we were untouchables.'"

"He tells us about his experience in school: 'I knew I was an untouchable, and that untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations.

For instance, I knew that in the school I could not sit in the midst of my classmates according to my rank, but I was to sit in a corner by myself.'"

"It is a shame that even today, millions of students from Dalit, Adivasi and OBC communities face such brutal discrimination in our educational system," Gandhi said.

"The murder of bright young people like Rohith Vemula, Payal Tadvi and Darshan Solanki is simply not acceptable. It is time to put a firm end to this. I urge the Karnataka government to enact the Rohith Vemula Act so that no child of India has to face what Dr BR Ambedkar, Rohit Vemula and millions of others have had to endure," Gandhi said in his letter dated 16 April.

Ambedkar had shown that education is the only means by which even the deprived can become empowered and break the caste system, Gandhi said. —*PTI*

Farmer assaulted by 4 pvt bank staffers

BIDAR, 18 APRIL

Farmer Rajkumar Nagappa Matte **PHOTO: SALAR**

A farmer was allegedly beaten and verbally abused by four private bank staffers who were trying to recover a loan instalment in Bidar on Thursday.

The farmer, Rajkumar Nagappa Matte, from Kesarajawalaga village in Bhalki taluk, had reportedly taken a loan of Rs. 39,000 from Sidya Siri Bank in Bhalki.

Nagappa said he had repaid an amount to the tune of Rs 36,000 through weekly instalments of Rs 835. Despite being timely with the payments and with only three instalments left, the four staff allegedly beat him with a stick while he was working in his field.

"I had taken a loan of Rs. 35,000/- from Sidya Siri Finance in my wife's name. While I was ploughing the field, Sidya Siri owner Sangamesh Chamkode and field officer Sangamesh Shaliwahan Biradar arrived on a motorcycle. They suddenly started abusing me and called me filthy words. They asked why I hadn't paid the remaining Rs 9,180," Nagappa told Salar News. "Then, Sangamesh Chamkode hit me on the forehead with a stick and Sangamesh Biradar hit me on the back with his hand."

"Soon after, cashier Kiran Patil and field officer Sunil arrived and said, don't spare him today.' They both kicked me on both my thighs." Nagappa added,

A case was registered against the four under sections 115(2), 118(1), 351(2), and 352 3(5) of the BNS. —*Salar News*

WORK IN PROGRESS

Work is in progress at the flyover near Hebbal junction in Bengaluru. This stretch of the flyover will ease traffic jams from Nagawara to Mekhri Circle **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

JEE (Main) second edition results by 19 April: NTA

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Results of the second edition of engineering entrance JEE (Main) will be announced by 19 April, NTA officials said on Friday.

The final answer keys will be notified by Friday, they added.

"The final answer keys of JEE (Main), 2025, Edition-II will be available for download on the JEE (Main) website on 18 April. The results of JEE (Main), 2025, will be declared latest by 19 April," a senior National Testing Agency (NTA) official said.

The NTA has received several complaints from candidates about errors in provisional answer keys. The agency asked students to wait for the final answer keys. The exam was conducted on 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 April. —*PTI*

BJP worker found dead after naming harassers in FB video

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Praveen Kumar **PHOTO: SALAR**

In a distressing incident, a 35-year-old worker of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Praveen Kumar, was discovered hanging from a tree near a private school in Sapthagiri Layout on Friday morning. The deceased was a resident of Denkanikottai in Tamil Nadu's Krishnagiri district.

Authorities have revealed that Praveen posted a video on his Facebook page at approximately 3am, expressing his mental distress over the past two months and naming seven individuals he blamed for his situation. In the video, he accused a man named Kiran of harassing women through phone calls and subjecting him to abuse.

Praveen further recounted an incident where he was allegedly lured into a meeting with promises of discussing repayment for a loan he had extended. Instead, he claimed he was ambushed, stripped of his phone, and physically assaulted for two hours by a group of nearly 20 individuals, including Kiran.

In a statement to the police, Praveen's sister, Soumya, alleged that her brother had lent money to a woman named Shwetha several months prior.

Following his repeated demands for repayment, Praveen was reportedly summoned to the residence of local BJP leader N Muniraju Gowda, where he was assaulted by Shwetha's associates, allegedly at the behest of Bhagyamma Srinivas, a local municipal councillor and relative of Shwetha.

The Anekal Police have initiated an investigation into the circumstances surrounding Praveen's death and are working to uncover the full extent of the allegations. —*PTI*

Thieves steal human hair worth Rs 25L; 1 nabbed

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

City police have apprehended one suspect linked to the theft of nearly 400 kg of processed human hair from a godown in Lakshmipura Cross. The arrested individual, Yellappa from Gadag, is part of a five-member gang that broke into the warehouse on 1 March, stealing hair valued at around Rs 25 lakh.

Police found over 300 kg of the stolen hair, estimated to be worth Rs 18 lakh, on Friday. The warehouse, owned by Venkataramanappa, stored cleaned hair intended for wig production, primarily catering to cancer patients and exports.

CCTV footage from the area helped the cops nab Yellappa. The hunt continues for the remaining four. —*Salar News*

Police say migrant couple's death was double suicide

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Police investigations into the tragic deaths of a migrant couple, whose bodies were discovered at a construction site in Dollar's Colony, indicate a possible suicide following a domestic dispute.

The deceased, Mehboob, aged 45, and his 35-year-old wife Parveen, hailing from Yadgir district, were employed as construction labourers and were living at the under-construction site in Sanjaynagar for a year. Authorities reported that a quarrel erupted between the couple three days prior over a personal matter.

Mehboob is believed to have ingested poison. Upon realising her husband's critical condition, Parveen allegedly hanged herself. The couple's absence went unnoticed until Thursday, when a foul odour prompted residents to alert Sanjaynagar police.

Forensic experts and fingerprint specialists from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) have since examined the site, collecting toxic substances and personal items. Investigators are now awaiting the post-mortem reports to conclusively determine the circumstances of the case.

Tragically, the couple leaves behind two young children, currently studying in Yadgir. Police have registered a case and are pending final forensic confirmation. —*Salar News*

POCSO CASE BOOKED

Man rapes girl, dumps newborn in garbage

BENGALURU 18 APRIL

A 23-year-old man was arrested on Friday after BBMP workers found a newborn's body at a garbage dump in Gandhinagar here. Yelahanka police found that the infant was born to a minor girl in a two-year secret relationship with the accused.

The baby reportedly died due to complications during an unassisted home delivery. To conceal the incident, the minor, under the accused's instructions, wrapped the body in a blanket, placed it in a plastic bag, and gave it to an elderly neighbour, claiming it was trash. The neighbour, unaware of the contents, discarded the bag in the dump.

The baby died due to complications during home delivery and the body was dumped in this garbage pile in Gandhinagar, Bengaluru **PHOTO: SALAR**

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) workers found the body of the infant around 8.30am on 2 April during a routine garbage collection and alerted the police. The infant was rushed to a government hospital, where doctors confirmed its death.

Police reviewed CCTV footage, identifying the elderly man on a bicycle disposing of the bag. His confession led to the minor girl, who revealed the sexual abuse and named Bharat, an auto driver, as the accused.

Further probe uncovered Bharath's coercion in concealing the pregnancy and disposing of the infant. Police are investigating potential involvement of others, including neighbours who assisted with the disposal.

Bharath has been booked under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act and remanded to judicial custody. The minor has been sent to an observation home as the investigation continues. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

1L Muslims protest Waqf Act

MANGALURU, 18 APRIL

In what is deemed as one of the largest public gatherings by the Muslim community in Karnataka in recent times, over one lakh people assembled under the banner of the Karnataka State Ulema Coordination Committee to protest the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, here.

The demonstrators voiced strong opposition to provisions in the amended law that, according to them, erode the autonomy of Waqf institutions and threaten the community's rights over religious and charitable endowments.

Addressing the gathering, the Committee's president, Sheikullah Taqwa Ustad, said the changes made to the Waqf Act signify a deeper attempt to "weaken" the institutional foundations of the Muslim community.

Former secretary of the Karnataka Waqf Board, Shafi Saeedi, said, "We are exposing the fascist forces that are ruling this country, and on 5 May, we believe the Supreme Court will vindicate our stand."

They questioned the rationale behind placing religious institutions such as Idgahs, mosques, cemeteries, and madrasas under government control through various provisions of the amended Act. — *PTI*

Cult of violence can't be tolerated: Bengal Guv

NCW lashes out at TMC for allowing violence to transpire

Charred vehicles at the site amid protests against the Waqf Bill, 2025, in Murshidabad, West Bengal **PHOTO: PTI**

KOLKATA/MALDA, 18 APRIL

Describing the recent episodes of violence in the Murshidabad and Malda districts of West Bengal as the "dance of death", WB Governor CV Ananda Bose on Friday strongly condemned the acts.

Speaking to ANI while en route to meet victims in the violence-affected areas, Bose noted the frequency of violence in various places in the state and that this "cult of violence" needs to be put in a "coffin."

"Violence is showing its ugly head on and off in Bengal in various places. We have to coffin the cult of violence and drive the last nail in the coffin. That is a task which is necessary to maintain peace and tranquillity in Bengal," Bose said.

"What has happened there (Murshidabad and Malda) should never have happened. The dance of death, if I may say so, that is going on in the streets of Bengal in many places -- this kind of cult of violence can never be tolerated at all," he added.

Similarly, a delegation of the National Commission for Women (NCW), led by its chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar, visited a relief camp in Malda. "What they had gone through is beyond imagination," she remarked.

"It is the duty of the state government to protect them. What are they doing? Is the TMC government planning to turn West Bengal into a second Bangladesh?" NCW member Archana Majumdar added. —*PTI*

> **A state government that cannot maintain an atmosphere of peace has no justification to remain in power**
>
> -Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister

'UNCONSTITUTIONAL'

Sibal slams Dhakhar's remarks on judiciary

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, 18 APRIL

Rajya Sabha member Kapil Sibal slammed Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday for questioning the judiciary over the timeline for the president to take decisions, terming it "unconstitutional".

"I have never seen any chairman of the House make political statements of this nature. Even BJP chairman in the past (has not done so)," Sibal said.

Sibal asserted that the Lok Sabha Speaker remains equidistant between the Opposition and the ruling party and not act as "spokesperson of the party".

Dhankhar during Rajya Sabha speech on 17 April questioned the judiciary setting a timeline for the President to take decisions and act as a "super Parliament."

The Supreme Court had sought to fix a timeline for the President to grant assent to the bills reserved for her consideration by the governor.

He also described Article 142, which grants plenary powers to the Supreme Court, as a "nuclear missile against democratic forces available to the judiciary 24x7".

Kapil Sibal **PHOTO: PTI**

Sibal pointed out that the President of India is a titular head, who acts on the advice of the council of ministers. A governor sitting on a bill for two years amounts to an intrusion on the supremacy of the legislature.

Meanwhile, the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu strongly opposed Dhankhar's remarks, terming it "unethical." DMK deputy general secretary Tiruchi Siva said that one should remember the supremacy of the Constitution. —*PTI*

PSC exam scam: CBI raids in Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR, 18 APRIL

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has conducted searches at five locations in Chhattisgarh—three in Raipur and two in Mahasamund—over alleged irregularities in state Public Service Commission exams during previous Congress government. Incriminating documents were recovered from premises linked to five individuals. The investigation concerns recruitment scams between 2020 and 2022 for posts such as Deputy Collector and Deputy Superintendent of Police. Seven people were arrested, including former CGPSC Chairman Taman Singh Sonwani, his nephews, and family members of industrialist Shravan Kumar Goyal. —*PTI*

NDA wins 325 uncontested seats in Assam polls

GUWAHATI, 18 APRIL

In a significant development ahead of the upcoming panchayat elections in Assam, a total of 348 seats have been decided uncontested, with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) securing 325, according to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The elections for the three-tier panchayat system are scheduled for 2 May and 7 May. Sarma announced that the last date for withdrawal of nominations was 18 April. Of the uncontested seats, 37 belong to the Zila Parishad (35 BJP, 2 AGP) and 288 to the Anchalik Panchayat (259 BJP, 29 AGP). Independents secured 15 Anchalik Parishad seats, while the Congress and AIUDF won nine and one seat, respectively. Sarma expressed confidence that the NDA's final tally would be even more impressive when the election results are declared on 11 May, highlighting the public's trust in the coalition. —*PTI*

Cong asks EAM to act on US students' visa revocation

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Congress on Friday expressed concern over the American Immigration Lawyers Association's claim that out of 327 visa revocation cases of international students collected by it so far, 50 per cent are Indians, and asked whether External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will take up the issue with his US counterpart. Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh shared on X a press statement issued on Thursday by the American Immigration Lawyers Association, and said it is cause for concern. "The reasons for revocation are random and unclear. There is growing fear and apprehension," Ramesh said. "Will the External Affairs Minister take note and raise the concern with his US counterpart?" Ramesh said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ajit Pawar defends Hindi in schools, prioritises Marathi

PUNE, 18 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has condemned opposition to Maharashtra government's initiative to introduce Hindi as a mandatory third language for students in classes one to five in both Marathi and English medium schools. Speaking at the inauguration of memorial for the Chapekar Brothers, Pawar claimed that critics are creating unnecessary disputes lacking significant issues. He reaffirmed that Marathi will always have priority in the state. Raj Thackeray, President of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, has opposed the move, accusing Centre of attempting to impose Hindi. Pawar reminded attendees that Prime Minister Narendra Modi granted Marathi classical language status and announced plans for a Marathi Bhasha Bhavan in Mumbai. —*PTI*

Bureaucratic rejig: New Revenue Secy named

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

- Aravind Shrivastava, a 1994 batch Karnataka cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, is currently working as Additional Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office.

In a top level bureaucratic reshuffle, Aravind Shrivastava has been appointed as Secretary, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance and Samir Kumar Sinha, Shrivastava's batchmate from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, has been appointed as Civil Aviation Secretary in place of Vumlunmang Vualnam who has been named as Secretary, Department of Expenditure.

Arvind Shrivastava **PHOTO: X**

Shrivastava, a 1994 batch Karnataka cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, is currently working as Additional Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office.

He succeeds Manoj Govil, who has been appointed as Secretary (Coordination), Cabinet Secretariat.

Eighteen IAS officers, including two working in the PMO, have been appointed to different central government departments as part of this secretary-level reshuffle that comes ahead of the Civil Services Day on Monday.

Vivek Aggarwal and Hari Ranjan Rao, both 1994 batch senior IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, have been appointed as Secretary, Ministry of Culture and Sports Secretary respectively. Anuradha Thakur, Additional Secretary in the Corporate Affairs Ministry, will take over as Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs after the superannuation of Ajay Seth on 30 June.

Rajesh Agarwal, has been named Special Secretary in the Commerce Ministry after the retirement of Sunil Barthwal on 30 September. —*PTI*

LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses the orientation programme of party's District Observers, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress will contest Gujarat bypolls solo, says Rahul Gandhi

AHMEDABAD, 18 APRIL

The opposition Congress party has confirmed it will not form an alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for the upcoming by-elections in two Gujarat assembly constituencies. Following a meeting of its political affairs committee, Gujarat Congress president Shaktisinh Gohil stated that the decision was influenced by AAP's unilateral declaration of its candidate for the Visavadar seat, which occurred without prior consultation.

Despite this divergence at the state level, Gohil reaffirmed that both parties will continue to operate within the INDIA bloc at the national level. He expressed disappointment that AAP had not adhered to the "gathbandhan dharma" by announcing its candidate for Visavadar prematurely.

The AAP designated Gopal Italia as their candidate for the Visavadar seat last month, while the Election Commission has yet to announce the bypoll dates. Gohil cited the recent electoral loss in Haryana as evidence of complications arising from AAP's independent decisions on candidacy.

He emphasised that Congress remains the dominant opposition party in Gujarat and announced that the party will independently field candidates in the upcoming bypolls. The Visavadar seat has been vacant since December 2023, and the Kadi seat has been empty since the death of BJP MLA Karsan Solanki on 4 February. —*PTI*

EX-CJI OPTS OUT OF J&K BOOK LAUNCH

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

A political storm has erupted over former RAW Chief AS Dulat's new book "The Chief Minister and The Spy", which claims that National Conference President Farooq Abdullah privately supported the abrogation of Article 370. Farooq has dismissed the claim as a "cheap stunt" to boost book sales, and both he and former Chief Justice of India TS Thakur have withdrawn from the book's launch. Justice Thakur, citing his apolitical stance and long-standing ties with the Abdullah family, said he did not wish to be seen endorsing a book now publicly disowned by its subject.

Meanwhile, J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has hit back at PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti for lending credibility to Dulat's claims. He questioned whether she also accepted what Dulat wrote about her father, the late Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, in his previous book. Omar accused Dulat of exaggeration for publicity, adding, "With friends like this, who needs enemies?" —*PTI*

'Mother's wish': Dilip Ghosh ties knot with colleague at 60

KOLKATA, 18 APRIL

Former West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh tied the knot with party colleague Rinku Majumdar in an intimate ceremony on Friday.

Ghosh, 60, said that he decided to get married to fulfill his mother's wish.

While he has been a bachelor till now, this is Majumdar's second marriage, and she has a son from the earlier one.

Ghosh, known for his one-liners and quirky takes, has been a member of the RSS since his youth, and has served it in various roles across the country before becoming the state BJP president in 2015.

The couple met in 2021 during morning walks at the Eco Park, and the relationship grew over time, people close to them said. —PTI

Dilip Ghosh weds party colleague Rinku Majumdar **PHOTO: PTI**

Sonia, Rahul eyed Rs 2K cr property for free: BJP

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The BJP on Friday challenged Congress leaders facing corruption charges to demand swift and time-bound trials, criticising the party for claiming political vendetta in the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) action against Sonia and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

Continuing its attack following the ED's chargesheet, the BJP accused Congress of funnelling public money into the National Herald, a paper with limited readership.

Former union minister Anurag Thakur alleged that the Congress treated the publication as its personal "ATM". He claimed the Gandhis sought to acquire property worth Rs 2,000 crore through the Young Indian company without investing their own money.

BJP Yuva Morcha members burn an effigy during a protest against the National Herald scam, in Patna **PHOTO: PTI**

- Continuing its attack following the ED's chargesheet, the BJP accused Congress of funnelling public money into the National Herald, a paper with limited readership.

Thakur said Sonia and Rahul Gandhi jointly own 76 per cent of Young Indian, which received a Rs 50 lakh loan from the Congress.

The company then took over Associated Journals Limited, which owns the Herald, in exchange for Rs 90 crore owed to Congress.

He questioned whether political parties are allowed to issue loans and challenged Congress leaders to seek quick trials if they believe the ED's actions are unfair. —*PTI*

'DELHI CAN'T CONTROL TN'

Stalin challenges Shah on NEET, elimination

TIRUVALLUR, 18 APRIL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday slammed Union Home Minister Amit Shah for saying the ruling DMK was harping on to issues like NEET and delimitation as "diversionary " tactics. Stalin asserted that Tamil Nadu would never fall under New Delhi's control.

"Tamil Nadu will never subjugate to Delhi, we have such a unique character. Your formula of breaking parties in other states through raids and intimidation will not work in Tamil Nadu," he said.

"Whether it is NEET or 3-language policy, Waqf Amendment Act or delimitation that likely to affect certain states-- only we are strongly voicing opposition. Amit Shah had said that we are saying these to divert attention. What I want to say is that Tamil Nadu is struggling for all Indian states. Is it wrong to demand states' rights," he asked.

Amit Shah, MK Stalin

PHOTO: PTI

Stali noted that the state moved the Supreme Court and got a "historic verdict" on state Governors. This was "DMK's power", he said.

He further asked Shah: "Can you say you can give NEET exemption, can you assure Hindi won't be imposed, can you list out the central funds given to Tamil Nadu and can you assure Parliamentary representation won't decline due to delimitation. If what we are doing is diversion, why haven't you given clear answers to people of Tamil Nadu on these issues," Stalin asked the union minister.

With Shah stitching up an alliance with the opposition AIADMK and exuding confidence of the NDA winning the 2026 polls, Stalin said that can never happen.

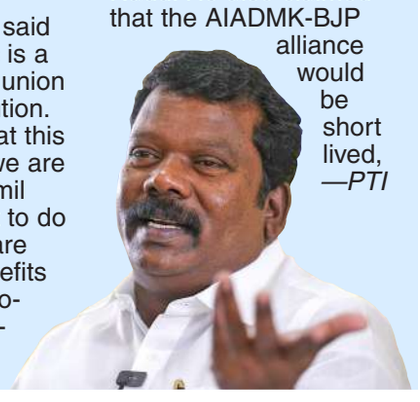
He accused BJP ministers, including Shah of speaking ill of Tamils in the past. "Tamil land is a soil of self-respect and valour, has never allowed domination," he said.

"We are not the slaves who will cave in to intimidation. Not just Amit Shah, no Shah can rule us, this is Tamil Nadu," the CM said. —*PTI*

TN Cong Chief urges DMK to conduct caste survey

CHENNAI, 18 APRIL

The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee advocated for the conduct of caste survey in the state, TNCC President K Selvaperunthagai said on Friday. Census is a subject under the union list of the Constitution. "We are urging that this should be done, we are requesting the Tamil Nadu government to do it so that the welfare schemes and benefits reach the right people in right proportion," he said, adding that the his party believes that the census is the Centre must also conduct a caste census. Congress is part of the DMK-led bloc in Tamil Nadu. He also claimed that the AIADMK-BJP alliance would be short lived, —*PTI*



DGCA orders probe into death of Air India Express pilot

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has ordered a detailed investigation into the circumstances that led to the recent death of an Air India Express pilot, including checking the medical history of the deceased and examining the existing guidelines to deal with such emergencies. The pilot, who was the first officer, died due to a sudden cardiac arrest while operating the flight IX1153 from Srinagar to Delhi on 9 April. The team will check whether the crew reported the sickness to the Air Traffic Controller while in air and if so, whether the ATC initiated action appropriately, besides if due precaution was taken during rostering of such crew member. *—PTI*

Man kills 70-yr-old mother over ₹200 for buying a dog

RAIPUR, 18 APRIL

A man has allegedly murdered his 70-year-old mother following her refusal to lend him Rs 200 to buy a dog in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. The accused, 45-year-old Pradeep Dewangan, reportedly attacked Ganeshi with a hammer after she denied his request. The incident took place around 8am in Nageshwar Nagar under Urla police jurisdiction. Dewangan, an e-rickshaw driver and father of three, was reportedly seeking a total of Rs 800 to purchase a puppy. During the attack, he also injured his wife, Rameshwari. The assault was interrupted when his 15-year-old son intervened and alerted neighbours, allowing Dewangan to flee the scene. The police rushed the victims to hospital, but Ganeshi later succumbed to her injuries. Authorities are currently pursuing Dewangan, with a murder charge filed against him. *—PTI*

Kochi cops to grill Tom Chacko over drug use claim

T'PURAM, 18 APRIL

Kerala government has announced an investigation into allegations made by actress Vincy Aloshious against co-actor Shine Tom Chacko, who is accused of using drugs on the set of a Malayalam film. Officials said the actor will be questioned to ascertain the reason behind his fleeing from a hotel, upon noticing an anti-drug raid. The search was conducted by the District Anti-Narcotic Special Action Force. Excise Minister MB Rajesh said no sector, including the film industry, would be exempt from scrutiny. Aloshious claimed she faced inappropriate behaviour from Chacko, including sexually explicit comments, during filming. Although she has not formally filed a police complaint, she expressed willingness to cooperate with any inquiry. Minister for Fisheries, Culture and Youth Affairs, Saji Cherian, emphasised the seriousness of the allegations, stating that action would be taken to uphold the film industry's reputation. *—PTI*

Man killed over sister-in-law's affair in Rajasthan

KOTA, 18 APRIL

A 25-year-old man was fatally assaulted in Doliya village after allegedly attempting to terminate his sister-in-law's relationship with a neighbour. The deceased, Bhanwarlal Bheel, was found with fatal injuries approximately 1.5 km from his home. Bhanwarlal lived with his sister-in-law, whose husband is currently incarcerated. She had reportedly been in a two-to-three-year relationship with neighbour Hemraj Bheel. Upon discovering the affair weeks ago, Bhanwarlal pressed the couple to end it. On Thursday, Bhanwarlal confronted Hemraj, leading to a violent clash involving stones and sticks. Following a complaint from Bhanwarlal's uncle, police have registered a case against both suspects under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and are currently seeking to apprehend them as they remain at large. *—PTI*

DU prof told to get speech approved before US visit

Varsity move 'unprecedented, undermines academic freedom'

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Delhi University (DU) professor Apoorvanand Jha claims the university administration "advised" him to submit the text of his proposed lecture at an academic event in the United States for approval.

Jha, a faculty member in the Hindi department, called the move "unprecedented", saying it undermines academic freedom.

The DU administration has not reacted to the allegations yet.

Jha has been invited to speak at a seminar, titled 'The University Under a Global Authoritarian Turn', as part of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the India China Institute at The New School, New York, scheduled from 23 April to 1 May.

Prof Apoorvanand Jha has been invited to speak at a seminar organised by the India China Institute at The New School, New York *PHOTO: PTI*

Jha said, "I received a mail from the registrar's office asking me to submit the text of my speech for approval. In my view, this is very alarming. We are losing the DU's autonomy willingly."

The professor said he had submitted his leave application more than 35 days in advance through the university's online Samarth portal, but received a mail from the DU on 2 April, which stated that the university was "unable to grant permission" and needed to seek advice from the Union Ministry of Education.

Jha then wrote a response to the registrar's office, "You said you were not aware of any specific rule under which the permission of the ministry is required. From our conversation, I concluded that the university is proactively, without any required law, rule or regulation, sending my leave application to the ministry," Jha wrote.

"You suggested that I should share my talk to be given at the India China Institute of the New School, which could be attached with the file to make it easy for the ministry to take a decision. Does it mean that the content of my talk would now be vetted before permission for participation in an academic event be given?" he asked. *—PTI*

A dargah being demolished in Nashik district of Maharashtra on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

SC orders stay after Nashik dargah razed

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Supreme Court stayed in the interim the demolition notice of the Nashik civic body for razing the Hazrat Saatpeer Sayed Baba dargah. It sought a report from the Bombay high court on non-listing of the shrine's plea. However, the civic body razed the dargah in Nashik during the intervening night of 15 and 16 April, just hours before the hearing.

A bench of Justices PS Narasimah and Joymala Bagchi had then noted the petition was filed before the high court on 7 April but not taken up for hearing.

"In the meanwhile, there shall be a stay of notice," the bench ordered and posted the matter on 21 April.

The court's "extraordinary measure" came after senior advocate Navin Pahwa, who was representing the dargah management, claimed despite efforts, the matter was not listed in the high court.

"It is specifically stated that the high court has declined to list the matter ever since," the top court said, recording Pahwa's submission. *—PTI*

BMC DEMOLISHES JAIN TEMPLE, SPARKS PROTESTS

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has demolished an alleged unauhorised Jain temple in Vile Parle area with community members terming the action as unwarranted.

Anil Shah, a trustee of the temple inside Neminath Cooperative Housing Society in Kambliwadi, said it was pulled down on 16 April.

The structure dated back to the 1960s and had been renovated with the BMC's permission, he said. "There is a government resolution which says such structures can be regularised. We have submitted a proposal to the BMC," he said. Some religious books and other items were damaged during the demolition, he said, adding that the action was taken at the behest of a local hotelier. *—PTI*

Locals protest over the death of a 17-year-old boy due to stabbing on Thursday evening, at Seelampur area, in New Delhi, Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Security tightened in Delhi after teen stabbed to death

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

A teenage boy was allegedly stabbed to death in Delhi's Seelampur on Thursday night.

Police sources said the murder was orchestrated by a woman referred to as "Lady Don", who wanted to avenge her brother's stabbing. "She had formed her own gang. She also recently went to jail in a case," the sources said.

The murder sparked protests in the area, prompting the police to beef up security.

The 17-year-old victim's mother claimed that a series of administrative lapses allowed the crime to take place.

Police suspect the murder was orchestrated by a woman referred to as 'Lady Don' *PHOTO: X*

"My son had a fight a few days ago. There was some incident, and my son was just standing there and watching as he got beaten up; they gave threats. We had taken him to the hospital; we had not eaten anything for two days. When he came back, he had asked for a samosa and milk and had gone out to get the food. He went out around 7pm, and by 7.15pm, we got the news that our son had been stabbed," the victim's mother told ANI.

She further said that the doctor who had treated the child was also beaten up. *—PTI/ANI*

RAPE ACCUSED PARADED NAKED IN UP

BAHRAICH, 18 APRIL

A rape accused was allegedly tied to a bullock cart, assaulted and paraded naked by locals in the Visheshwarganj area of Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich district. Police on Friday registered a case against unidentified individuals after a video of the incident went viral on social media.

The video showed several people inciting a dog to attack the man as he remained tied to a bullock cart with nothing on his lower body, while some encouraged his thrashing. The victim's family filed a police complaint on 17 April before the video went viral, alleging that he was tied with ropes and beaten near a village on 3 April.

Additional Superintendent of Police (City), Ramanand Prasad Kushwaha said that the man had been booked in a rape case lodged by a woman from a different community of the same village. The complaint was filed several days after the incident. He had been absconding since the FIR was registered. *—PTI*

Travel agent held at IGIA for facilitating 'Dunki' route

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Delhi Police arrested a 36-year-old travel agent from Punjab, identified as Naresh Kumar, for allegedly facilitating illegal entry into the United States through the so-called 'Dunki route'.

Kumar, a resident of Matoulli village in Patiala, was apprehended after an Indian deportee returned from the US, drawing attention of authorities to suspected document forgery.

The case surfaced on the night of 4 April when Gursahib Singh, a 39-year-old from Tarn Taran district, arrived at Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA). Immigration officials discovered signs of tampering on his passport, including glue marks that indicated forgery.

During interrogation, Singh detailed his dealings with another agent, Gurdev Singh alias 'Gurri', who had promised to help him enter the US for a fee of Rs 20 lakh. Singh paid Rs 17 lakh in cash and later transferred Rs 3 lakh to an account linked to Kumar. *—PTI*

Deol, Hooda booked for 'Jaat' hurting Christians

JALANDHAR, 18 APRIL

An FIR has been lodged against actors Sunny Deol, Randeep Hooda, and three others following a complaint alleging that a scene in the film 'Jaat' has "hurt the sentiments" of the Christian community. The movie, which was released on 10 April, is claimed to contain scenes that show disrespect towards Jesus Christ and Christian religious practices, according to police sources.

The complaint was filed by Viklav Gold, a leader of the Christian community, who raised concerns about the timing of the film's release, coinciding with Good Friday, which is observed on 18 April this year.

Sanjeev Kumar, the Station House Officer (SHO) of Jalandhar Cantt police station, confirmed that the FIR was registered on Wednesday evening, naming actors Sunny Deol, Randeep Hooda, and Vineet Kumar, along with director Gopichand and producer Naveen.

The FIR has been filed under Section 299 of the Indian Penal Code, which addresses deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings by insulting religion or its beliefs. The case has drawn attention to ongoing sensitivities surrounding portrayals of religion in popular media. *—PTI*

Dalit groom in Agra attacked during wedding procession

AGRA, 18 APRIL

A Dalit groom was reportedly assaulted by a group of upper-caste men during a wedding procession in the Nagla Talfi area of Agra, leaving several people injured.

The incident occurred on Wednesday evening as the wedding party arrived from Mathura. According to a complaint filed by Anita, a local resident, the procession was en route to a marriage venue nearby, accompanied by celebratory music from a DJ.

Anita claimed that a group of upper-caste men arrived armed with sticks and batons and attacked the groom and other participants. "They beat up the groom and several members of the wedding party. Due to the assault, no rituals could be performed at the marriage venue. The entire ceremony had to be shifted and conducted at our home instead," she stated.

Assistant Commissioner of Police PK Rai confirmed the attack. *—PTI*

ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Harassment led to suicide of former Kerala pleader: Cops

KOCHI, 18 APRIL

Relentless harassment by a former client led Kerala High Court lawyer and former senior government pleader PG Manu to take his own life, the investigating police team said. Manu had also represented the NIA.

According to the police, Manu's former client Johnson Joy had been previously arrested by the Ernakulam Rural Police in October last year in connection with an attempt to murder case. While he was in jail, his wife approached Manu seeking legal assistance in the matter.

But, after securing bail, Joy accused Manu of raping his wife and later allegedly told the lawyer that the matter could be settled if he offered an apology. Manu had been arrested last year

PHOTO: PTI

in a similar case of allegedly sexually assaulting a female client and was out on bail.

Fearing that a fresh sexual abuse case could result in the cancellation of his existing bail, Manu, accompanied by his wife and sister, went to Joy's residence, police said.

There, they were coerced into apologising to Joy's wife. The apology was recorded on a mobile and Joy slapped Manu and verbally abused him with casteist slurs in front of his wife and sister, police said. The video shows that the accused repeatedly asked him to end his life, a police officer said.

Investigators revealed that Joy had allegedly demanded financial compensation to settle the matter, but Manu declined. The video was then posted on social media and it went viral.

Police said they were investigating the involvement of more persons in the case as Manu was subjected to pressure through some friends and certain online media platforms.

Manu was found dead at his residence in Kollam on 13 April. Joy was arrested on Wednesday on charged of abetting suicide and extortion and under relevant sections of SC, ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. *—PTI*

HERITAGE COLLECTIONS

Gita, Natyashastra inscribed on UNESCO's World Register

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Manuscripts of 'Bhagavad Gita' and Bharat Muni's 'Natyashastra' are among 74 new documentary heritage collections that have been added to UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

UNESCO now has a total of 570 inscribed collections.

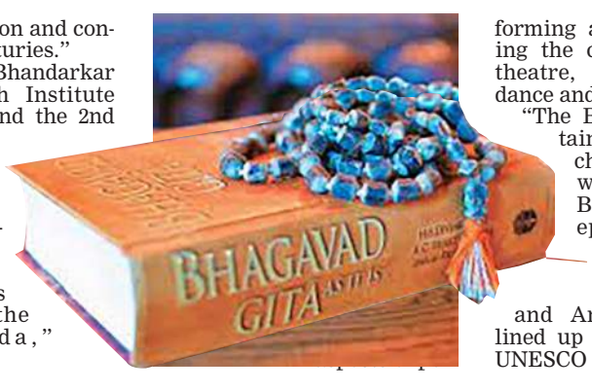
Entries on scientific revolution, women's contribution to history and major milestones of multilateralism from 72 countries and four international organisations are included in the register.

It comprises books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, sound or video recordings as a documentary heritage of humanity.

The development comes on the 'World Heritage Day' on Friday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a post on X on Friday, described the inscriptions as "a proud moment for every Indian across the world. The Gita and Natyashastra have nurtured civilization and consciousness for centuries."

Preserved at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and codified around the 2nd century BC, the Natyashastra is "an epitome of the Natyaveda, an oral body of knowledge of performing art containing 36,000 verses known as the Gandharvaveda," UNESCO stated.



forming arts, thus articulating the character of Indian theatre, poetics, aesthetics, dance and music.

"The Bhagavad Gita, containing 700 verses in 18 chapters, is embedded within the Bhismaparva of the epic Mahabharata and takes the form of a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna with armies lined up for the great war," UNESCO said.

Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat also described it as a "historic moment for Bharat's civilisational heritage".

UNESCO's executive board adds collections to the register after evaluation of nominations by an independent international advisory committee.

The Permanent Delegation of India to UNESCO also acknowledged the inscriptions of ancient Indian texts on the register. *—PTI*

GOOD FRIDAY

A member of the Christian community takes part in the re-enactment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Good Friday at a church, in Rajkot. Good Friday also known as Black Friday is a holy day marking the crucifixion of Jesus and his death at Calvary. It's celebrated during Holy Week as part of the Paschal Triduum ***PHOTO: PTI***

Students in US faced with revocation of visas

More than 1,000 international students have had their visas or legal status revoked in recent weeks, and several have filed lawsuits against the Trump administration, arguing the government denied them due process when it suddenly took away their permission to be in the US.

The actions by the federal government to terminate students' legal status have left hundreds of scholars at risk of detention and deportation. Their schools range from private universities like Harvard and Stanford to large public institutions like the University of Maryland and Ohio State University to some small liberal arts colleges.

At least 1,024 students at 160 colleges, universities and university systems have had their visas revoked or their legal status terminated since late March, according to an Associated Press review of university statements, correspondence with school officials and court records.

At least 1,024 students at 160 colleges, universities and university systems have had their visas revoked or their legal status terminated since late March ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

In lawsuits against the Department of Homeland Security, students have argued the government lacked justification to cancel their visa or terminate their legal status. Visas can be cancelled for a number of reasons, but colleges say some students are being singled out over infractions as minor as traffic violations, including some long in the past. In some cases, students say it's unclear why they were targeted.

"The timing and uniformity of these terminations leave little question that DHS has adopted a nationwide policy, whether written or not, of mass termination of student (legal) status," ACLU of Michigan attorneys wrote in a lawsuit on behalf of students at Wayne State University and the University of Michigan.

In New Hampshire, a federal judge last week issued a restraining order in the case of a Dartmouth College computer science student from China, Xiaotian Liu, who had his status terminated by the government. Attorneys have filed similar challenges in federal court in Georgia and California. Homeland Security officials did not respond to a message seeking comment.

In some high-profile cases, including the detention of Columbia University activist Mahmoud Khalil, President Donald Trump's administration has argued it should be allowed to deport noncitizens over involvement in pro-Palestinian activism. But in the vast majority of visa revocations, colleges say there is no indication affected students had a role in protests.

"What you're seeing happening with international students is really a piece of the much greater scrutiny that the Trump administration is bringing to bear on immigrants of all different categories," said Michelle Mittelstadt, director of public affairs at Migration Policy Institute.

Students in other countries must meet a series of requirements to obtain a student visa, usually an F-1. After gaining admission to a school in the US, students go through an application and interview process at a US embassy or consulate abroad. Students on an F-1 visa must show they have enough financial support for their course of study in the US. They have to remain in good standing with their academic programme and are generally limited in their ability to work off-campus during their academic programme.

Once they're in the US, international students' legal status is overseen by the Student and Exchange Visitor Programme under the Department of Homeland Security.

In recent weeks, leaders at many colleges learned the legal residency status of some of their international students had been terminated when college staff checked a database managed by Homeland Security. In the past, college officials say, legal statuses typically were updated after colleges told the government the students were no longer studying at the school.

Historically, students who had their visas revoked were allowed to keep their legal residency status and complete their studies. The lack of a valid entry visa only limited their ability to leave the US and return, something they could reapply for with the State Department. But if a student has lost legal residency status, they risk detention by immigration authorities. Some students already have left the country, abandoning their studies to avoid being arrested.

Higher education leaders worry the arrests and visa revocations could discourage students overseas from pursuing higher education in US.

The lack of clarity of what is leading to revocations can create a sense of fear among students, said Sarah Spreitzer, vice president of government relations at the American Council on Education. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Israeli soldiers protest against Gaza war

When nearly 1,000 Israeli Air Force veterans signed an open letter last week calling for an end to the war in Gaza, the military responded immediately, saying it would dismiss any active reservist who signed the document.

But in the days since, thousands of retired and reservist soldiers across the military have signed similar letters of support.

The growing campaign, which accuses the government of perpetuating the war for political reasons and failing to bring home the remaining hostages, has laid bare the deep division and disillusionment over Israel's fighting in Gaza. By spilling over into the military, it has threatened national unity and raised questions about the army's ability to continue fighting at full force.

It also resembles the bitter divisions that erupted in early 2023 over the government's attempts to overhaul Israel's legal system, which many say weakened the country and encouraged Hamas' attack later that year that triggered the war. "It's crystal clear that the renewal of the war is for political reasons and not for security reasons," Guy Poran, a retired pilot who was one of the initiators of the air force letter, told The Associated Press (AP).

The catalyst for the letters was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision on 18 March to return to war instead of sticking to a ceasefire that had facilitated the release of some hostages. Netanyahu says the military pressure is needed to force Hamas to release the remaining hostages. Critics, including many families of the hostages, fear that it will get them killed.

One month after Netanyahu resumed the war, none of the 59 hostages held by Hamas have been freed or rescued, of whom 24 are believed to still be alive.

In their letters, the protesters have stopped short of refusing to serve. And the vast majority of the 10,000 soldiers who have signed are retired in any case. Tens of thousands of academics, doctors, former ambassadors, students and high-tech workers have signed similar letters of solidarity in recent days, also demanding an end to the war.

"We are aware of the relative importance and the weight of the brand of Israeli Air Force pilots and felt that it is exactly the kind of case where we should use this title in order to influence society," said Poran.

The war erupted on 7 October, 2023, when Hamas carried out a surprise cross-border attack, killing about 1,200 people in southern Israel and taking 251 others hostage. Throughout the war, Netanyahu has set two major goals: destroying Hamas and bringing home the hostages. Israel's offensive has reduced much of Gaza to rubble and killed more than 51,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, who don't differentiate between civilians and combatants.

While Israel has come under heavy international criticism over the devastation in Gaza, the domestic opposition to the conflict reflects a widespread belief that Netanyahu's war goals are not realistic. Nearly 70 per cent of Israelis now say bringing home the hostages is the most important goal of the war, up from just over 50 per cent in January 2024, according to a study conducted by the Jerusalem think tank Israel Democracy Institute. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents said Netanyahu's two goals cannot be realized together.

The survey interviewed nearly 750 people and had a margin of error of 3.6 percentage points. Netanyahu's opponents have also accused him of resuming the war to pander to his hardline coalition partners, who have threatened to topple the government if he ends the fighting.

Many people were surprised by the military's snap decision to dismiss air force reservists who signed the protest letter.The army, which is mandatory for most Jewish men, has long served as a melting pot and unifying force among Israel's Jewish majority.

As the protest movement has grown, a military official said the army is taking the letters "very seriously." He said it joins a list of challenges to calling up reservists and that the army is working to support them. A growing number of reservists have stopped reporting for duty, citing exhaustion, family reasons, and the financial burden of missing work.

Although only a few hundred of the signatories are still actively serving, the Israeli military has been stretched by 18 months of fighting and isn't in any position to be turning away anyone from reserve duty.

Many Israelis are also furious that as reservists repeatedly get called up for action, the government continues to grant military exemptions to Netanyahu's ultra-Orthodox governing partners.

The number of Israelis continuing to report for reserve duty has dropped so low that the military has taken to social media to try to recruit people to keep serving. *—PTI*

Tens of thousands of academics, doctors, former ambassadors, students and high-tech workers have signed similar letters of solidarity in recent days, also demanding an end to the war ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Here's why scientists want to spend billions on a 70-yr project in Swiss Alps

The Large Hadron Collider has been responsible for astounding advances in physics: the discovery of the elusive, long-sought Higgs boson as well as other new exotic particles, possible hints of new forces of nature, and more.

Located at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) on the border of France and Switzerland, the LHC is expected to run for another 15 years. Nevertheless, physicists are already planning what will come after it.

One of the most favoured proposals for CERN's next step is the 70-year Future Circular Collider (FCC) project. More than three times the size of the LHC, this enormous proposed machine promises to resolve some mysteries of the universe – and undoubtedly reveal some new ones.

The LHC, which occupies a circular tunnel 27kms in circumference, is currently the largest machine in the world. The FCC would be housed in a much larger 91kms tunnel in the Geneva basin between the Jura mountains and the Alps.

The first stage of the FCC would be the construction and operation of a collider for electrons (the lightweight particles that make up the outer shell of atoms) and positrons (the antimatter mirror images of electrons). This collider would allow more precise measurements of the Higgs boson.

The second stage would be a collider for protons (heavier particles found in the cores of atoms). The LHC already collides protons, but the new collider would accelerate the protons up to more than seven times as much energy.

This increase in collision energy allows for the discovery of particles never produced by humanity before. It also brings with it technical challenges, such as the development of high-powered superconducting magnets.

The most high-profile result from the LHC has been the discovery of the Higgs boson, which lets us explain why particles in the universe have mass: they interact with the so-called Higgs field which permeates all of space.

This was a great victory for what we call the Standard Model. This is the theory that, to the best of our current knowledge, explains all the fundamental particles in the universe and their interactions.

However, the Standard Model has significant weaknesses, and leaves some crucial questions unanswered.

The FCC promises to answer some of these questions.

CERN estimates the first stage will cost around USD 18 billion, spread out over 12 years ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

For example, we know the Higgs field can explain the mass of heavy particles. However, it is possible that a completely different mechanism provides mass to lighter particles.

We also want to know whether the Higgs field gives mass to the Higgs boson itself. To answer these Higgs questions we will need the higher energies that the FCC will provide.

The FCC will also let us take a closer look at the interactions of very heavy quarks. (Quarks are the tiniest components of protons and some other particles.) We hope this may shed light on the question of why the universe contains so much more matter than antimatter.

And the FCC will help us look for new particles that might be dark matter, a mysterious substance that seems to pervade the universe.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the FCC will provide the answers to these questions. That is the nature of curiosity-driven research. You know the journey, but not the destination.

The FCC is not the only major particle physics project under consideration.

Another is a proposed 20kms machine called the International Linear Collider, which would likely be built in Japan.

The US has several projects on the go, mainly detectors of various kinds. It also supports an "offshore Higgs factory", located in Europe or Japan.

One project that may concern the FCC's backers is the planned 100 kilometre Chinese Electron Positron Collider (CEPC), which has significant similarities to the FCC.

This poses a dilemma for Europe: if China goes ahead with their project, is the FCC still worthwhile? On the other hand, CERN chief Fabiola Gianotti has argued that the FCC is necessary to keep up with China.

The decision on the FCC won't be taken lightly, given the large cost associated with the project.

CERN estimates the first stage will cost 15 billion Swiss francs (around USD 18 billion), spread out over 12 years. One third of this cost is the tunnel construction.

The size of the sum has attracted criticism. However, a CERN spokesperson told the Agence France-Press that up to 80 per cent of the cost would be covered by the organisation's current annual budget.

The second stage of FCC, which would reuse the 91km tunnel as well as some existing LHC infrastructure, is currently estimated to cost 19 billion Swiss francs. This costing carries a large uncertainty, as the second stage would not be commissioned until 2070 at the earliest.

Pure science has not been the only benefit of the LHC. There have been plenty of practical technological spinoffs, from medical technology to open and free software.

One specific example is the Medipix chips developed for a detector at the LHC, which are now used across multiple areas in medical imaging and material science.

For the past 70 years, CERN has served as a fantastic model for peaceful and efficient international collaboration. Beyond its astonishing scientific output, it has also produced significant advances in engineering that have spread through society. Building the FCC will be an investment in both technology and curiosity. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

178 arrested for protesting against Israel in Pakistan

KARACHI, 18 APRIL

Police in Pakistan have arrested over 178 individuals following a series of more than 10 mob attacks on KFC outlets, fuelled by rising anti-US sentiment and opposition to Israel's actions in Gaza. The incidents were reported in major cities, including Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. In Lahore, police are enhancing security at 27 KFC locations after two attacks occurred and five were thwarted. Faisal Kamran, a senior police officer, confirmed the arrests of 11 individuals connected to the Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, although the group denies any official involvement in the protests. TLP spokesperson Rehan Mohsin Khan stated that calls for boycotting Israeli products do not extend to KFC protests. *—The Times of Israel*

Buddha tooth relic returns to Sri Lanka after 16 years

COLOMBO, 18 APRIL

A rare exhibition of the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha commenced in Kandy, Sri Lanka, on Friday, marking the first such event in 16 years. The exposition will run for ten days, concluding on 27 April, with public viewing available daily from noon to 5pm local time, as confirmed by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's office. Ambassadors from 17 countries, including India, have been invited to travel by train to witness this significant occasion. Senior monk Mahawela Rathanapala reported that tens of thousands of devotees have already begun lining up to venerate the relic, recognised for its profound spiritual and cultural importance to the island's predominately Sinhala Buddhist population. *—PTI*

S'pore Defence Minister quits ahead of polls

SINGAPORE, 18 APRIL

Singapore's Defence Minister, Ng Eng Hen, announced his decision to step down from politics on Friday, becoming the first confirmed minister to withdraw from the upcoming general election set for 3 May. At 66, Ng cited the importance of leadership succession within the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) as his reason for stepping aside to make way for new talent. He remarked on the necessity of balancing renewal and experience, noting that senior politicians must pave the way for the next generation. Ng has been a pivotal figure in Singaporean politics for over 20 years, serving as Defence Minister since 2011, and previously leading the Education and Manpower ministries. *—PTI*

Four Indians stuck in Myanmar scam racket repatriated

NAYPYITAW, 18 APRIL

The Indian Embassy announced on Friday the successful repatriation of four Indian citizens who fell victim to scam operations in Myawaddy. The embassy facilitated their exit permits with Myanmar authorities, advising against accepting dubious job offers and illegal border crossings between Myanmar and Thailand, which could jeopardise future travel. This recent repatriation brings the total number of Indian nationals rescued from Myawaddy scam networks to 36. Previously, 32 victims were returned on 10 April, followed by four individuals on 12 April. The embassy reiterated the dangers of fraudulent employment propositions and illegal border movement, reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding Indian citizens abroad. Reports said Myawaddy is a hotspot for such scams. *—PTI*

Firefighters of Ukrainian Emergency Service douse flames after a Russian drone attack in Kamianske, Dnipropetrovsk region, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

US will 'move on' if truce talks prove a dud: Rubio

Europe joins talks with US, Ukraine for the first time

PARIS, 18 APRIL

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that the US may be ready to "move on" from efforts for a Russia-Ukraine peace deal if there is no progress in the coming days. The comments come at a time when Ukraine and US signed a memorandum of intent for an economic partnership agreement on Thursday, published by the Ukrainian government, in which US will establish an investment fund for the reconstruction of Ukraine as a sovereign country.

"We are not reaching a point where we need to decide whether this is even possible or not," he said on Friday in Paris after a marathon day of landmark talks among US, Ukrainian and European officials. Rubio said the discussions had been constructive and produced an outline for steps toward peace.

Rubio along with US Presidential envoy Steve Witkoff led the high level talks with Ukraine where Europe participated for first time discuss an end to the war even as European concerns grow about Trump's readiness to draw closer to Russia.

French officials said a new meeting in the same format is expected in London in the coming days. Rubio said he could join that meeting, and it's expected early in the week.

Efforts by the Trump administration to broker a ceasefire have not succeeded so far. Rubio said the US wants to decide "in a matter of days whether or not this is doable in the next few weeks".

Moscow has effectively refused to accept a comprehensive ceasefire that Trump has pushed and Ukraine has endorsed. Russia has made it conditional on a halt in Ukraine's mobilisation efforts and Western arms supplies, which are demands rejected by Ukraine. *—PTI*

Russian President Putin, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and US Secretary of State Rubio **PHOTO: PTI**

US TO IMPOSE PORT FEES ON CHINESE SHIPS

LOS ANGELES, 18 APRIL

The US will impose port fees on Chinese ships in 180 days' time in an attempt to revive its shipbuilding industry but scaled back penalities after warnings about negative impact on consumers.

Fees on Chinese vessel owners and operators of ships will be based on the weight of their cargo rather than the number of ports they visit. It will be assessed up to five times a year, and can be waived if the owner places an order for a ship built in the US.

"Ships and shipping are vital to American economic security and the free flow of commerce," said the US trade representative Jamieson Greer, announcing the new fees, most of which from mid-October.

"The Trump administration's actions will begin to reverse Chinese dominance, address threats to the US supply chain, and send a demand signal for US-built ships," Greer added. *—Agencies*

I like her very much: Trump lauds Meloni over EU tariff deal

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

In what may indicate a positive turn of relations between US and Europe, US President Donald Trump lavished praise on Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and expressed confidence about the prospects of a US-EU trade deal.

"There will be a trade deal, 100 percent," Trump declared. Meloni echoed the sentiment, saying she was "sure" a deal could be reached.

The two leaders in alignment on conservative values like immigration and opposition to 'woke ideology' projected warmth during a working lunch and Oval Office meeting.

"I do like her very much," he told reporters in the White House. "I think she's a great prime minister and I think she's done a fantastic job in Italy. I knew she had great talent, she's one of the real leaders of the world. We have a good relationship, together and as countries," he added as he accepted her invitation to Rome.

Meloni was the only European leader to be invited to Trump's inauguration. The first EU leader to visit the White house, she positioned herself as the leader best placed to defuse Trump's trade war, since he imposed 20% tariffs on EU exports. Though the tariffs have been paused for 90 days, negotiations are ongoing.

"Even if we have some problems between the two shores of the Atlantic, it is the time that we try to sit down and find solutions," Meloni said.

The Italian Prime Minister emphasised her belief in "unity" despite the trade dispute, stating regarding the United States, "If I didn't consider it a reliable partner, I wouldn't be here." Meloni is now returning to Italy for talks with US Vice President JD Vance. The talks may focus on tariffs, and defence spending, and possibly explore ways to "make the West great again." *—Agencies*

President Donald Trump with Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni **PHOTO: PTI**

Lebanese soldiers gather near a car destroyed in an Israeli strike in the southern coastal town of Ghazieh **PHOTO: PTI**

17 killed in Gaza as new US envoy takes charge

DEIR AL-BALAH, 18 APRIL

Israeli airstrikes across Gaza killed at least 17 people early Friday including children, hospital workers said, as the new US ambassador to Israel made his first public appearance in Jerusalem.

The strikes came a day after more than two dozen people died in Gaza as Israel ramps up attacks, pressuring Hamas to return the hostages and disarm.

The US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee who has earlier expressed his support to Israel's right to annex West Bank Huckabee's delivered a peace message from US President Donald Trump at western wall. He comes at a pivotal time in the 18-month war, as international mediators including the US are trying to get a broken ceasefire back on track.

On Thursday, aid groups raised the alarm over Israel's blockade of of Gaza, where it has barred entry of all food and other goods for more than six weeks. Thousands of children have become malnourished, and most people are barely eating one meal a day as stocks dwindle, the United Nations said.

Israel's Defence Minister says the blockade is one of the "central pressure tactics" against Hamas, which Israel accuses of siphoning off aid to maintain its rule. Aid workers deny there is significant diversion of aid, saying the UN closely monitors distribution. Rights groups have called it a "starvation tactic". *—PTI*

US strike on Yemeni port kills 74 people

DUBAI, 18 APRIL

In largest ever US airstrikes in Yemen it targeted the Ras Isa oil port, sourcing fuel for the Houthis, killed 74 people and wounded 171 others, even as it said a Chinese satellite company was 'directly supporting' Houthis.

In one of the highest reported death tolls so far since March 15, satellite images show destroyed tanks and vehicles at Yemen port hit by US airstrikes as oil leaks into the Red Sea. The Iranian-backed Houthis later Friday launched a missile toward Israel that was intercepted, the Israeli military said, causing sirens to sound in Tel Aviv and other areas.

Meanwhile, US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce in a briefing with journalists accused Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co. Ltd., a commercial satellite image provider, of "directly supporting Iran-backed Houthi terrorist attacks on US interests."

Bruce acknowledged a story by The Financial Times that quoted anonymous sources saying the firm linked to the People's Liberation Army provided images allowing the rebels to target US warships and commercial vessels travelling through the Red Sea corridor.

"Beijing's support, by the way, of that company, the satellite company, even after we've engaged in discussions with them about this ... certainly contradicts their claims of being peace supporters," Bruce said.

Chinese officials and the company, known by the acronym CGSTL, could not be immediately reached for comment. Chinese state media did not acknowledge the accusation. The US Treasury sanctioned CGSTL in 2023 for allegedly providing satellite images to the Russian mercenary force the Wagner Group as it fought in Ukraine as part of Russia's full-scale invasion. *—PTI*

An oil tanker burns after US airstrikes targeted the Ras Isa oil port held by Yemen's Houthi rebels in Hodeida **PHOTO: X**

Xi Jinping completes state visit to Cambodia amid US tariff concerns

PHNOM PENH, 18 APRIL

Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded a two-day state visit to Cambodia on Friday, part of a wider tour of Southeast Asia that included Vietnam and Malaysia. This visit comes at a time when these nations face economic pressures from proposed tariffs by US President Donald Trump.

As China boosts its influence in the region, presenting itself as a stable partner amidst the uncertainty of US trade policies, Cambodia is facing potential tariffs that could be as high as 49 per cent on exports to the US. China's growing economic presence, particularly its status as Cambodia's largest trading partner, has been significant in the past decade. During Xi's stay, he met with Cambodian leaders, including King Norodom Sihamoni, Prime Minister Hun Manet, and Senate President Hun Sen. *—PTI*

B'desh seeks $4.3B as reparations, apology from Pak

DHAKA, 18 APRIL

Bangladesh sought reparations and a public apology from Pakistan over the 1971 atrocities as the two countries held their first foreign secretary-level talks in 15 years here on Thursday.

Dhaka also asked Pakistan to pay USD 4.3 billion as its share from the combined assets at the time when East Pakistan split from Pakistan in 1971 to form an independent Bangladesh.

The Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin with his visiting Pakistani counterpart Amna Baloch takes place days ahead of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka on April 27 and 28.

"We have raised the historically unresolved issues with Pakistan," Uddin told reporters after the FOC.

Uddin further said that the issues included "the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, equitable distribution of undivided assets, transfer of foreign aid funds sent for the victims of the 1970 cyclone, and a formal public apology for the genocide committed by the then Pakistani military in 1971". *—PTI*

'CHINESE MISMANAGEMENT'

Nepal finds billions embezzled in Pokhara Airport project

KATHMANDU, 18 APRIL

A parliamentary subpanel has revealed extensive embezzlement and corruption totalling approximately 14 billion Nepali Rupees (£95 million) during the construction of the China-funded Pokhara International Airport. The investigation conducted by the House of Representatives' Public Accounts Committee (PAC) uncovered serious irregularities associated with the project, led by Rajendra Lingden, president of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party.

China CAMC Engineering, the state-owned firm responsible for the construction, is alleged to have overlooked quality controls and mismanaged funds. Initial costs, estimated at NRs 14 billion, ballooned to NRs 22 billion as concerns were raised over substandard construction materials and improper site elevation. Reports suggest that soil required to meet the specified runway height was never sourced, despite significant payments for transportation.

The investigation also implicated the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), with calls for the suspension of its director general, Pradeep Adhikari, due to his role in overseeing the project from 2014 to 2017. Further probes are recommended for other officials linked to the project.

Despite its recent opening, the airport has struggled to attract international flights, raising concerns over its viability and the economic burden of Chinese loans. As a consequence, Nepali officials are now seeking a conversion of the loan into a grant. The Pokhara airport is being touted as the biggest ever corruption scam in the Himalayan country. *—PTI*

An investigation conducted by the House of Representatives' Public Accounts Committee uncovered serious irregularities **PHOTO: X**

PHOTO: X

Govt tweaks gas policy to quarterly allocations

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The government will now allocate natural gas to CNG and piped cooking gas retailers two quarters in advance to give city gas companies greater clarity, the Oil Ministry said Friday. With city gas retailers like Indraprastha Gas Ltd, Mahanagar Gas Ltd and Adani-Total Gas Ltd reporting pressures on margins after the allocation of cheaper administered price or APM gas to them was cut without giving enough advance notice, ministry decided to tweak the allocation policy. Besides the lower-priced APM gas produced from old fields given on a nomination basis, allocation will also now include gas from new wells drilled on nomination fields of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation and Oil India Ltd, it added. *—PTI*

India lacks creativity in automobile sector: NITI Aayog

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

India's growth in global automobile sector is held back due to a lack of innovation, primarily driven by inadequate Research and Development (R&D) infrastructure, says a report by NITI Aayog. The report stated that India's spending on R&D remains among lowest in world, especially when compared to leading automotive nations such as Germany, Japan, and US. While Indian manufacturers have built a strong reputation for producing low-cost, high-volume vehicles, the report noted that the absence of a strong innovation culture has prevented development of advanced and differentiated products. This lack of innovation makes it difficult for India to stand out in the highly competitive global automobile market. *—ANI*

Divi's Lab & global pharma firm sign supply pack

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Divi's Laboratories on Friday said it has inked a supply agreement with a global pharmaceuticals firm. Under the long-term agreement, the company will be manufacturing and supplying advanced intermediates as per the commercial terms agreed between the parties, Divi's Laboratories said in a regulatory filing. The company expects meaningful revenue contribution from this long-term agreement, it added without disclosing the identity of the partner. "The company is planning for capacity addition at its manufacturing facilities with an estimated investment between Rs 650 crore to Rs 700 crore, to be funded from internal accruals," it said. Shares of the company were trading 2.07 per cent down at Rs 5,638.35 apiece on BSE. *—PTI*

91% of govt's investment to focus on 5 sectors

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Nearly 91 per cent of the Central government investments, worth Rs 6.8 lakh crore, were focused towards the five key sectors of the economy – renewable electricity, road transport, refineries, conventional electricity and shipping – in the financial year 2024–25, said a research report by the Bank of Baroda. Renewable electricity projects alone accounted for 37 per cent or about Rs 2.7 lakh crore of the total investment, which is expected to generate at least 12,555MW of power. The remaining 9 per cent was distributed across sectors such as chemicals, steel, railways, minerals, storage and distribution, housing, electricity transmission, commercial complexes, fertilizers, health, and education. Among states, Chhattisgarh to get the highest share of investments at Rs 1.4 lakh crore. *—PTI*

China bans Boeing, but it may be Indian airlines' gain

Beijing has asked carriers to suspend deliveries of Boeing aircraft

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Boeing still has 130 jets with pending delivery to Chinese carriers, but experts says that some of these aircraft could ultimately be redirected to India **PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA**

The rising trade war between China and the US might push Boeing to redirect planes to India, which was initially designated for China.

Customers have been voicing out the delayed deliveries amid the rapid growth in the country's aviation sector.

Beijing has ordered local carriers to suspend deliveries of Boeing aircraft. It also ordered the stop of obtaining parts and components from US companies.

China Southern has announced it will suspend a planned sale of Boeing planes due to the expected fallout from the trade war. US had imposed a 145 per cent tariff on Chinese imports and Beijing retaliated with 125 per cent tariffs.

Boeing still has 130 jets pending delivery to Chinese carriers, but experts suggest that some of these aircraft could ultimately be redirected to India.

"There is a severe shortage of aircraft in India and the carriers are desperate ... so it is quite possible that some of those planes [meant for China] will be shipped there," said Mark Martin, CEO of aviation consultancy Martin Consulting.

Satyendra Pandey, managing partner at aviation consultancy AT-TV, agreed to the statement saying that the "situation is very dynamic."

"Given the strength of the India market and its capacity requirements, it can be a possibility," he said. "Any decision will involve a bit of time and [be taken after] looking at multiple scenarios."

If Boeing ends up redirecting supplies to India, it wouldn't be unprecedented. Last year, it delivered several "white tail" aircraft—jets originally built for other customers but left unsold—to Tata Group's Air India. Air India Chief Executive Campbell Wilson had mention the carrier as a "victim of circumstance, as is every other airline" and that delay in delivery have crimped it's ability to expand. *—Agencies*

JAGGI BROTHERS' DARK SIDE

Gensol debacle & dead BluSmart

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Once celebrated as rising stars in the country's renewable energy sector, brothers **Anmol Singh Jaggi** and Puneet Singh Jaggi are now facing serious allegations of financial misconduct.

The duo had launched two prominent ventures -- Gensol Engineering and BluSmart Mobility, quickly gaining recognition for their contributions to clean energy and electric mobility. However, their reputation took a significant hit following Sebi's investigation.

In a dramatic turn of events, regulator Sebi, through its interim order on Tuesday, barred the Jaggi brothers from accessing the securities markets until further notice.

The action comes amid accusations of siphoning off loan funds from their publicly listed company Gensol Engineering for personal use, raising concerns over corporate governance and financial misconduct.

The rise and fall of Gensol

Gensol Engineering is engaged in providing solar consulting services, engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) services, and leasing of electric vehicles, among others.

It was initially listed on the BSE SME platform on 15 October, 2019, and subsequently, it was migrated to the main board of BSE and NSE on 3 July, 2023. The company saw rapid growth over the years with standalone sales rising from Rs 61 crore in FY17 to Rs 1,152 crore in FY24.

During the same period, operating profit jumped from Rs 2 crore to Rs 209 crore, while net profit rose from Rs 2 crore to Rs 80 crore.

Its balance sheet expanded from Rs 10 crore in FY17 to Rs 2,202 crore in H1 FY25.

Sebi received a coplaint in June 2024 related to manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from Gensol and thereafter, started examining the matter. *—PTI*

NCLAT sets aside Byju's settlement plea

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Riju Raveendran **PHOTO: X**

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has set aside the appeals filed by BCCI and Riju Raveendran seeking withdrawal of insolvency proceedings against Byju's and consider the settlement between the debt-ridden edtech firm and the apex cricket body.

They had challenged the order passed by the Bengaluru bench of the National Company Law Tribunal, which had on 10 February, 2025 directed to place their settlement offer before the new Committee of Creditors (CoC), in which US-based Glas Trust, the trustee for lenders to which Byju's owes USD 1.2 billion, is a member.

A two-member Chennai bench of the NCLAT upheld the directions passed by the NCLT and said the settlement proposal was filed after the formation of CoC, hence as per section 12 A of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, it requires the approval of the lender's body.

Both BCCI and Riju have contended that since the application under Section 12A was filed before the constitution of the CoC, the provisions of Section 12A coupled with Regulation 30A(1)(a) shall apply.

They also contended that form FA, which is an application for withdrawal of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process, was submitted before the formation of CoC of Byju's.

However, rejecting the plea NCLAT said, "Form FA, admittedly having been filed on 14 November, 2024, is post CoC." *—PTI*

Infosys approves Rs 51 cr ESOP for CEO

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

India's second largest IT company Infosys' board has approved the grant of stock incentives or Employee Stock Option Plans (ESOPs) worth over Rs 51 crore to CEO and MD **Salil Parekh**.

These stock incentives are under various heads including ESG and equity, and add up to over Rs 51 crore.

In a recent filing, the company said the board, based on the recommendations of the Nomination and Remuneration Committee, approved the said annual grants to Parekh, as per his employment agreement approved by shareholders.

Among them is "grant of annual performance-based stock incentives (Annual Performance Equity Grant) in the form of Restricted Stock Units (RSUs) covering company's equity shares having a market value of Rs 34.75 crore as on the date of the grant under the 2015 Stock Incentive Compensation Plan".

This, Infosys said, would vest 12 months from the date of grant subject to achievement of performance targets as determined by the board.

The nod also includes grant of annual performance-based stock incentives in the form of RSUs covering company's equity shares having a market value of Rs 2 crore as on the date of the grant under the 2015 Plan, which shall vest 12 months from the date of the grant, subject to the company's achievement of certain environment, social and governance milestones as determined by the board. *—PTI*

Ashwini Vaishnaw showcases India's AI server 'Adipoli'

India's electronics manufacturing has grown fivefold in the past decade **PHOTO: ANI**

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw showcased India's first fully designed AI server named Adipoli, developed by VVDN Technologies, and said it is a major step forward for the "Make in India" initiative.

Vaishnaw highlighted that Adipoli is equipped with eight GPUs and was completely designed in India, underlining the country's growing strength in advanced electronics and artificial intelligence.

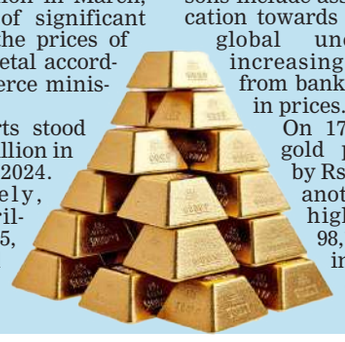
The said Indian-made electronic products are becoming increasingly reliable and globally competitive.

He emphasised that India's focus on protecting intellectual property rights is gaining recognition in international markets, boosting investor confidence and encouraging innovation in the country.

India's electronics manufacturing has grown fivefold in the past decade, touching Rs 11 lakh crore, he said. *—ANI*

Gold imports rise 192% to $4.47B in March

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL



After registering negative growth, the country's gold imports, which impact Current Account Deficit, jumped by 192.13 per cent to USD 4.47 billion in March, on account of significant increase in the prices of the yellow metal according to commerce ministry data.

Gold imports stood at USD 1.53 billion in January 2024. Cumulatively, during April-March 2024-25, the inbound shipments rose 27.27 per cent to USD 58 billion against USD 45.54 billion in 2023-24.

The increase in imports also indicates strong investor confidence in gold as a safe asset. The other reasons include asset diversification towards gold due to global uncertainties, increasing demand from banks, and jump in prices.

On 17 April, the gold prices rose by Rs 70 to hit yet another record high of Rs 98,170 per 10g in the national capital. *—PTI*

US defends steel, aluminum tariffs

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The US has informed the global trade body WTO that the decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium was based on national security grounds and should not be considered as safeguard measures, the US said after India requested consultations under the WTO's Safeguards Agreement on 11 April. India has said that even though the US calls them security measures, they are in essence safeguard measures. "The (US) President imposed the tariffs on steel and aluminum pursuant to Section 232, under which the President determined that tariffs are necessary to adjust imports of steel and aluminum articles that threaten to impair the national security of the US," America has said in a communication, dated 17 April, to the trade body. On 10 February, US revised the safeguard measures on imports of steel and aluminium articles, effective from 12 March, 2025, the communication said. *—PTI*

ITC to acquire 24 Mantra Organic for Rs 472.50 cr

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Multi-conglomerate ITC will acquire Sresta Natural Bioproducts, which owns the brand 24 Mantra Organic, in an all-cash deal valued at Rs 472.50 crore, to expand its play in the fast-growing organic food products.

ITC has signed an agreement with Sresta Natural Bioproducts Private Limited (SNBPL) to acquire a 100 per cent stake in the company, ITC informed in a regulatory filing.

Besides, ITC also announced the acquisition of the remaining 73.5 per cent stake of Mother Sparsh Baby Care. ITC had acquired a 26.5 per cent stake in the company in 2022.

About the SNBPL, ITC said it will be an all-cash deal, and the cost of acquisition is up to Rs 472.50 crore on a cash-free, debt-free basis.

"The share purchase agreements, comprising Rs 400 crore payable upfront at closing and up to Rs 72.50 crore payable in the next 24 months post closing," it said.

The SNBPL's portfolio comprises over 100 organic products, spanning branded grocery staples, spices and condiments, edible oils, and beverages, among others. Besides, it has a strong international presence with a deep connection with the Indian diaspora. *—PTI*

GOVERNMENT CLARIFIES

FASTag toll system collection to remain

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

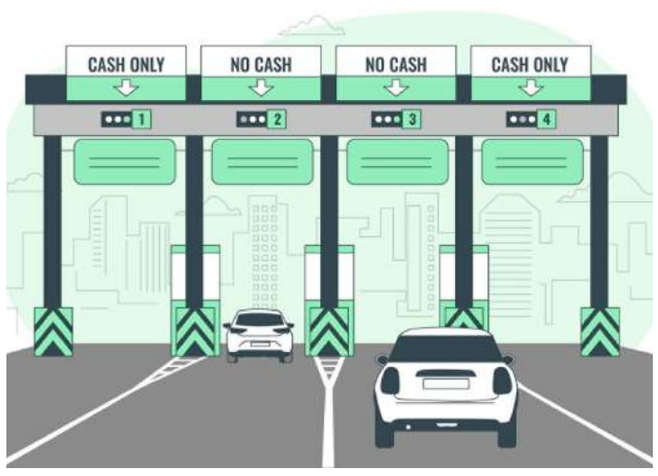


PHOTO:FREEPIK

The central government has clarified that the satellite-based tolling system will not be launched from 1 May, 2025, in replacement to the existing FASTag-based toll collection system.

The clarification comes after reports emerged stating satellite-based toll systems will replace FASTag toll collection starting in May.

"This is to clarify that no such decision has been taken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways or National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) regarding the nationwide implementation of satellite-based tolling from 1 May, 2025," said the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in a statement.

To enable seamless, barrier-free movement of vehicles through toll plazas and reduce travel time, an ANPR-FASTag-based Barrier-Less Tolling System will be implemented at selected toll plazas, the ministry has supplemented.

The advanced tolling system will combine "Automatic Number Plate Recognition" (ANPR) technology, which identifies vehicles by reading their number plates, with the existing 'FASTag system' that utilises Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) for toll deduction.

Under this system, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high-performance ANPR cameras and FASTag Readers, eliminating the need to stop at toll plazas.

In the event of non-compliance, E-Notices will be served to the violators, and non-payment may result in the suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN-related penalties.

The ministry stated that NHAI has invited bids for the implementation of the "ANPR-FASTag-based Barrier-Less Tolling System," which will be installed at selected toll plazas. *—PTI*

SECL enters Rs 7,040 crore pact with TMC Mineral

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Coal India arm SECL on Friday said it has entered into a Rs 7,040-crore pact with TMC Mineral Resources for undertaking large-scale coal production using paste filling technology.

Paste filling is a modern underground mining method that eliminates the need to acquire surface land. After coal extraction, the mined-out voids are filled with a specially prepared paste made from fly ash, crushed overburden from opencast mines, cement, water and binding chemicals. This process prevents land subsidence and ensures the structural stability of the mine.

"South Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL) is set to become the first coal public sector undertaking (PSU) in India to adopt paste fill technology for coal mining... To implement this innovative underground mining technology, the SECL has signed a Rs 7,040-crore agreement with TMC Mineral Resources Pvt Ltd," the PSU said in a statement.

Under this agreement, large-scale coal production will be undertaken using paste filling technology in Singhali underground coal mine located in SECL's Korba area. *—PTI*

Veer, Anahat enter semis of world squash c'ship

KUALA LUMPUR, 18 APRIL

Indian squash players Veer Chotrani and Anahat Singh advanced to the semifinals of the World Championship Qualifying Event (Asia) after registering contrasting wins here on Friday. Chotrani logged a come-from-behind win over home favourite Mohammad Syafiq Kamal in the men's event. The second-seeded Indian prevailed 9-11, 11-,6 11-6 11-7 over his sixth-seeded opponent to make the last-four stage. The 17-year-old Anahat, seeded fifth, produced a dominant display, defeating Japan's Akari Midorikawa 11-1, 11-,7 11-5 in the women's quarterfinals. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Thomas makes 11 birdies for 61 to take lead

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, 18 APRIL

Justin Thomas had a round to match the immaculate weather Thursday at Harbour Town with 11 birdies that allowed him to tie the course record with a 10-under 61 to lead the RBC Heritage. The best shot he hit all day was an 8-iron that dropped near the pin and settled 5 feet away. He missed that birdie putt, one of the few chances he didn't convert. There was little to complain about on a day of hardly any wind, a course in mint condition, and warm sunshine that added to the RBC Heritage being the ideal place to decompress from the hectic week at the Masters.—*PTI*

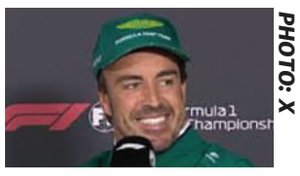


PHOTO: X

Fernando Alonso continues to defy age

JEDDAH, 18 APRIL

At 43, Fernando Alonso continues to defy age and push the boundaries of endurance in a Formula 1 car and while the two-time world champion doesn't see himself racing at 50, he plans to take it one season at a time once his Aston Martin contract runs out in 2026. Aston Martin don't have a race-winning car at the moment but their long-term ambition is to win the championship. He would be happy to walk into the sunset and start a new role at Aston Martin.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Holger Rune shocks Ruud to reach semifinals

PARIS, 18 APRIL

Holger Rune delivered an impressive performance to knock out defending champion Casper Ruud in the quarterfinals of the 2025 Barcelona Open. The Danish rising star secured his spot in the semifinals with a dominant 6-4, 6-2 victory, setting up a highly anticipated clash with Karen Khachanov. Rune came out aggressively in the first set, striking with power from his forehand and committing very few unforced errors. Ruud, on the other hand, struggled to find his rhythm and was unable to counter Rune's relentless pace. The Danish player broke Ruud twice to take a commanding 4-0 lead. Although the Norwegian fought back, breaking Rune's serve to get one break back.—*PTI*

Delhi and Gujarat collide for supremacy

Capitals sit pretty at the top with 10 points

AHMEDABAD, 18 APRIL

Mitchell Starc's mastery of death overs will be up against Mohammed Siraj's artistry when the high-flying Delhi Capitals take on an equally well-placed Gujarat Titans in a high-voltage top-of-the-table IPL clash here on Saturday.

The Capitals sit pretty at the top with 10 points from six games, while the Titans trail close behind with eight from as many outings.

Confidence in the Delhi camp would be soaring after their dramatic Super Over win over Rajasthan Royals, another heist scripted under pressure with Starc at the heart of it. The Australian left-arm quick bowled three overs of pinpoint yorkers, including a nerve-wracking Super Over, to turn the game on its head.

Having skipped the Champions Trophy to freshen up after the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Starc has returned to the IPL recharged and razor sharp. With 10 wickets at an economy rate of just over 10, he's led the DC pace unit featuring Mukesh Kumar and Mohit Sharma. If Starc can conjure another match-defining spell, it could be the edge that Delhi needs.

His battle with Gujarat Titans' top order, led by skipper Shubman Gill, the consistent Sai Sudharsan, and Ashes rival Jos Buttler, could prove pivotal. So far, the trio has carried the bulk of the batting load, with at least one of them notching a half-century in every match.

The GT middle order, largely untested, faltered when finally called upon against Lucknow Super Giants, resulting in a defeat. If Delhi can crack that top-order code early, the ripple effect could tilt the contest in their favour.

—*PTI*

> **Urging our batters to suitably tweak their approach on difficult surfaces**
>
> -Daniel Vettori, Sunrisers Hyderabad coach

Mohammed Siraj and Mitchell Starc

DC VS GT

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	5
DC Won:	3
GT Won:	2

DC vs GT Match starts at **3.30 pm IST**

RR desperately need a win against LSG

RR's campaign has struggled to find momentum

JAIPUR, 18 APRIL

An inconsistent Rajasthan Royals will be desperate to plug the holes across departments and halt a three-match losing streak when they host Lucknow Super Giants in the Indian Premier League here on Saturday.

With just two wins from seven games, the Royals are languishing at eighth on the table and come into the contest on the back of a gut-wrenching Super Over defeat to Delhi Capitals. As the league hits the halfway mark, they'll need to shake off the heartbreak quickly if they hope to upstage Rishabh Pant's men and climb out of the bottom half. Plagued by inconsistency in both batting and bowling, RR's campaign has struggled to find momentum. To make matters worse, skipper Sanju Samson suffered a side strain in the previous match and had to retire hurt, though he later said he was feeling "alright."

The Royals' batting, built around Indian mainstays, has misfired far too often, leaving the middle order exposed and under pressure. Opener Jaiswal, however, seems to have shaken off his rustiness with back-to-back half centuries against RCB and DC. But it will have to be seen if he carries the momentum into Saturday's match. Samson is yet to produce a defining knock, with the 66 he made in RR's first match against Sunrisers Hyderabad being his best so far. A lot will depend on his and Jaiswal's form regarding how RR fare against the likes of Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Digvesh Rathi, and Bishnoi. —*PTI*

> **Rohit Sharma looks to be in his zone again, a big score is coming very soon**
>
> -Mark Boucher Former South Africa wicketkeeper-batter

Sanju Samson and KL Rahul

LSG VS RR

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	5
RR Won:	4
LSG Won:	1

LSG vs RR Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

Ben Shelton beats Luciano to reach Munich semifinals

MUNICH, 18 APRIL

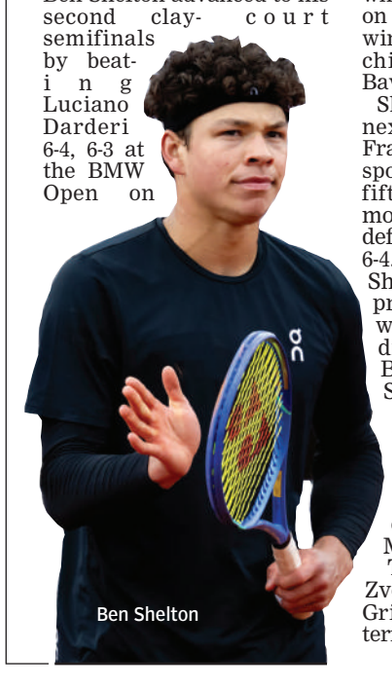
Ben Shelton advanced to his second clay-court semifinals by beating Luciano Darderi 6-4, 6-3 at the BMW Open on Friday.

The 22-year-old American, who won the Houston title on clay a year ago, hit 29 winners to Darderi's 12 in chilly temperatures in Bavaria.

Shelton, the No. 2 seed, next faces Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo for a spot in the final. The fifth-seeded Cerundolo moved into the last four by defeating David Goffin 6-2, 6-4. Before the tournament, Shelton attended his first professional soccer game when Bayern Munich drew 2-2 with rival Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

In reaching his ninth tour-level semifinal, Shelton ended Darderi's career-best winning streak at seven matches, which included the Marrakech title.

Top-seeded Alexander Zverev was playing Tallon Griekspoor in a later quarterfinal match. —*PTI*



Ben Shelton

Calance Open Golf: Ghai ends long wait for second title

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Gurugram's Tapendra Ghai hung on to his lead with a tenacious even-par 70 on the final day to end his long wait for a second title at the INR 1 crore Calance Open 2025 played at the Qutab Golf Course in New Delhi.

The 29-year-old Ghai (64-67-62-70), the overnight leader by four shots, who won his only previous title on the PGTI in 2018, signed off for the week with a total of 17-under 263 to prevail by one shot. Naveed, another Delhi-based professional who set the course record of 60 earlier in the week, brought in a card of 64 on Friday to secure 4th place. —*PTI*

ISSF WORLD CUP

Shriyanka Sadangi finishes eighth in women's 50m rifle 3P

LIMA, 18 APRIL

Paris Olympics shooter Shriyanka Sadangi finished eighth in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) final on the third day of the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun stage here.

She became the latest Indian shooter on this double-legged South American sojourn to cut a maiden individual World Cup final, but exited the 10th shot of the standing position round, the 40th of the 45-shot final.

Sagen Maddalena of the USA, the silver medallist in the Paris Games, won the gold.

Sagen's effort took the USA to the top of the medal tally with three golds and six medals.

India was second at the end of the competition on day three on Thursday, with two gold medals and a silver, and a bronze each.

Indian shooters had a challenging day overall, with none of them making the men's 3P final and also finding themselves with lots to do after the first round of qualifying in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) event.

Shriyanka Sadangi

In the women's 3P as well, the Indians struggled after the first two kneeling and prone positions. But all three Shriyanka, Ashi Chouksey, and previous World Cup gold winner Sift Kaur Samra picked up the pace admirably in the final standing position to dash the qualifying mark.

Shriyanka succeeded in taking seventh with a solid 588, while Ashi finished stronger on accuracy than Sift, taking the ninth spot to the latter's 11th with both stopping at 587 and thereby missing out narrowly.

In the final, the Indian began well with a 10.5 as her first effort, but as the grind to the finish began in right earnest, Shriyanka petered out. Her best chance was when she had moved up to sixth with two more shots of the second Prone position remaining, but returns of 9.8 and 9.3 effectively doused her challenge. —*PTI*

Sharma improves by 13 shots but fails to cut China Open

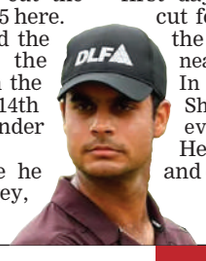
SHANGHAI, 18 APRIL

Shubhankar Sharma bounced back from an 82 in the first round with a fine 69 in the second but failed to cut the Volvo China Open 2025 here.

Sharma, who started the second round from the tenth, had a bogey on the 12th but birdied the 14th and the 18th to be 1-under at the turn.

On the second nine he had four birdies, a bogey, and a double bogey on the ninth for a 69 at the Enhance Anting Golf Club.

Despite improving his score by 13 shots as compared to the first day, Sharma could not cut for the first time after the Magical Kenya Open nearly two months back. In these two months, Shubhankar played four events, including the Hero Indian Open 2025, and cut in all of them. —*PTI*



F1 title fight is increasingly focused on McLaren

JEDDAH, 18 APRIL

Ahead of Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, this Formula 1 season is looking like McLaren vs. McLaren. Still, defending champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull says he hasn't lost hope.

McLaren drivers Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri are the only ones to consistently have the pace through the first four rounds of the championship. Norris has a three-point lead but admits he isn't at his best, while Piastri is the driver with momentum after winning in Bahrain last week.Ferrari, Red Bull, and Mercedes have all had their moments, but none has been a consistent challenger, as McLaren's 58-point constructors' championship lead shows. Verstappen is the only non-McLaren driver to win a Grand Prix this season but in Bahrain he was struggling so much that Red Bull motorsport adviser Helmut Marko said he was concerned Verstappen might consider his future. Verstappen said this week he wasn't considering the championship picture this early in the season. "I'm not thinking about that. I just go race by race," Verstappen said. "I think at the moment, of course, we are not the quickest. So then naturally, it's very tough to fight for a championship, but it's still a very long road... I'm hopeful that we can still improve things, and we'll see what we get." Two-time champion Fernando Alonso dampened speculation that Verstappen could seek to join his team, Aston Martin, after Red Bull car designer Adrian made that move last year. —*PTI*

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

Tottenham edges Frankfurt 1-0 SFs

LONDON, 18 APRIL

Tottenham Hotspur defeated Eintracht Frankfurt 1-0 on the 18th (Korean time) at the Deutsche Bank Park in Frankfurt, Germany, in the second leg of the quarterfinals of the 2024-2025 UEFA Europa League. Having drawn 1-1 in the first leg, Tottenham advanced to the semifinals with an aggregate score of 2-1.

Tottenham was in a must-win situation after recording a draw at home in the first leg. Son Heung-min was excluded from the roster due to injury, leaving a gap in the squad, but the team secured their semifinal spot with the victory.

The winning goal was scored by Dominic Solanke. A penalty kick was awarded in the 38th minute of the first half after James Maddison collided with the opposing goalkeeper, and Solanke converted it to break the deadlock. —*PTI*

Tottenham players celebrate after beating Frankfurt in the Europa League. ***PHOTO: X / @SPURSOFFICIAL***

MU beat Lyon

Harry Maguire headed in the winner as Manchester United produced an astonishing extra-time comeback on Thursday to beat Lyon and set up a Europa League semi-final against Athletic Bilbao, while Tottenham Hotspur are also through to the last four after beating Eintracht Frankfurt. Maguire's header in added time in extra time gave United a 5-4 win on the night at Old Trafford, and a 7-6 triumph on aggregate.

Liverpool can win 20th English title this weekend

LIVERPOOL, 18 APRIL

The countdown is on for Liverpool to clinch a record-tying 20th English top-flight title. It could even happen this weekend.

Should Arsenal lose at Ipswich early Sunday afternoon, Liverpool will get the chance to wrap up the Premier League championship a few hours later by beating Leicester.

Otherwise, the title could be confirmed on Wednesday when Arsenal hosts Crystal Palace or the following weekend when Liverpool hosts Tottenham at Anfield.

It looks certain to happen, given Liverpool holds a 13-point lead with six games left. Needing just six more points to be certain, barring the unlikeliest of collapses, it's now a matter of when, not if.

Having led the way virtually all season, however, the Merseyside club is hardly powering to the finish line.

The big gap to Arsenal has taken the pressure off. Maybe that's why Liverpool hasn't been playing with the intensity the team has displayed for much of the campaign, and is typically needed in a title run-in. —*PTI*